

Chapter 2

Translation, interpretation and interpreter

Introduction: hermeneutic *praxis* over *theoria*

Even within the Semitic religions, which are usually classed as emphasising orthodoxy rather than orthopraxy, there are the 'liberation theology' movements that challenge that very bias and invert it, such that the lived *praxis* (of the poor and oppressed) overrides the elitism that surrounds the abstraction (*theoria*) and domination that comes with orthodox ideals (Swidler 1998). In this respect scripture is brought to a context not as a presiding wisdom, but in such a way that an appropriate and new perspective on it arises. In liberation theologies, the importance of allowing theology to arise from specific contexts of lived-experiences may lead to the possibility that violence could become a means necessary for bringing about ideological freedom and socio-political justice. This situation is not too dissimilar from the later militarisation of the Sikhs into the Khālsā of Gurū Gobind Singh to defend themselves against the oppression of Mulsim rule. The parallel suggests that the innovations which occurred during the Gurū Period (crudely speaking from 'pacifism' to 'activism') were directed by a religiosity which was inextricably bound to historical *praxes* rather than by theoretical deliberation over any 'theology' and its universal expression. Indeed, in this respect, Taran Singh, Professor of Gurū Granth Studies at Panjabi University, despite acknowledging Gurū Amar Dās' statement that, 'there is one *bani*, one guru, and one interpretation of the *sabd* [*sabadu*]',¹ argues that 'the Enlightened community has the right and authority to find the right application of the *sabd* in varying situations in the discharge of its responsibility' (c.1975: 32).² This idea of contextual application is missed by any token theologisation of *guramati*. How can the Word be separated from its application without turning it into a metaphysical abstraction, especially if one can only gain knowledge of the Word via its contextual engagement? This point also relates to a broader perspective wherein even *dharma* is understood as 'context-sensitive'.³

¹ *ikā bāṇī iku guru iko sabadu vīcārī*. '(there is) one utterance, one guru (and) in reflection, one Word'. (GGS: 646, SoV: M3, pa.10, sa.2.1). Or with *vīcārī* as verb: 'there is one utterance, one guru, having reflected on the one Word'. Thus translating *vīcārī* as 'interpretation' may be misleading.

² Teja Singh, commenting on the same line of the GGS, makes the same misguided point, 'There are definite verses in the Holy Granth which refer to the oneness of the Guru, and which can bear only one interpretation'. (1970: 57).

³ Flood notes, '*dharma* can be adapted to particular situations and particular applications of it were decided by a local assembly of a number of learned men' (1996: 57–8), and gives an example from the *Dharma-śāstras*, 'the religious obligations of men differ at different ages and vary according to caste (*jāti*), family (*kula*), and country (*deśa*)'. *The Laws of Manu*, 1.85; 1.110.

There is an ethical and political dimension in treating *praxis* over *theoria*, or of letting *theoria* arise out of *praxis*. Smith (1996), using Aristotelian terms, has argued that modernity can be understood to be a period in which there is a privileging of *theoria*, and ever more increasingly *techne*, over *praxis* and *phronesis*. This has led to abstract ideals, laws and codes that are anti-nature and anti-human at heart, which sacrifice the immediate lived experience of the present for an idealised future that all are 'progressing' towards. When *theoria* precedes *praxis*, then a relatively small elite group of 'experts' (philosophers, priests, politicians, scientists, lawyers) possess the power to legislate ideals that subordinate the diversity of different practices to the rule of ideal laws. This subordination of *praxis* to abstract systems ignores the richness and complexity of the Other as experienced in everyday interaction, leading to simplified homogenisations. Such a situation conveniently side-steps the difficult issue of the transformation of that transcendental 'Truth', 'Law' or 'Revelation' in translation and interpretation according to localised contexts.

Many scholars see such approaches as deeply problematic given their embeddedness within various Enlightenment presuppositions that assume a metaphysical ground. From the vantage point of late/post-modernity, one can try to redress the balance between *theoria* and *praxis* if not indeed invert it. It is also for this reason that the ideas of nonduality and skilful means become relevant. If *praxis* is the focus, the enactment of liveable truths demands equity in dialogue; here truths are formed in engagement with the Other, rather than discovered by any one people and then imposed on others. This outlook demands an inherently interpretive process at its base, where 'truths' are inseparable from lived practices and diverse forms of communication, existing in translation not as complete units in any one language awaiting transference into another, but as embodied motivations calling for realisation through transformative negotiation. Generally, Indian religious teaching speaks of a *praxis* beyond its mere representation and codification in words:

It is not knowledge through representation and symbol, but knowledge by being the Real. One who knows *Brahman* becomes *Brahman*. (Murti 1996: 310).

The general focus of the thesis, then, is the pragmatics of understanding itself and specifically how to understand Gurū Nānak's teachings (*guramati*) in a diasporic, English context. Unlike previous exegesis into English, the aim here is not to re-present Gurū Nānak's teachings (without regard for the process of cross-cultural translation and interpretation) but to evidence a self-conscious hermeneutic engagement with them. This will inevitably involve representations, yet they are not understood as final descriptors capturing the essence of *guramati*, but as nodes of an on-going network of culturally located engagements.

Now that the main indigenous understandings and uses of texts, language and commentary have been acknowledged, it remains to ask how the textual process is to be understood across cultural boundaries and by whom: what does it mean to situate the GGS in the West and interpret it from within a Western discourse? Part of this process requires that not only the text be contextualised, but also the interpreter. And in doing so the primary issue becomes translation, understood in its widest sense: whether Gurū Nānak's words can 'speak again' and more specifically whether they can 'speak' (and thereby be heard) in English. Following Gadamer's understanding of hermeneutics 'as the art of bringing what is said or written to speech again' (Gadamer 1981: 119), the necessity of translation and interpretation for any understanding to occur is brought to the fore. Perhaps the most important notion in orienting this interpretive exploration is Ricoeur's idea that it is not so much who is 'behind the text' (i.e. Gurū Nānak), as who is 'in front' of the text that matters in interpretation. The romantic belief that the intentions of the author, their 'original meanings', are somehow magically present in the text, to be rediscovered by the 'faithful' interpreter, has been roundly criticised and 'surpassed' by hermeneutics since Schleiermacher and Dilthey (Palmer: 1969). However, what is present is the text and its (post)modern interpreter. If the interpreter is to meaningfully engage with the text, then his/her present context will influence the textual dialogue, so that in order to understand at all, the particular interpreter will have to understand differently from those in other locations, languages and times.

This 'textual' study at its very simplest, then, involves two foci for reflection: the 'text' and the 'interpreter'. As the first chapter has initially contextualised the text as something approaching a *gura-sabadu praxis*, within the wider arenas of the *guru-celā* and text-traditions, this chapter concentrates on contextualising the interpreter and his interpretative approach.

Given that most second and third generation Sikhs think in Western thought forms and categories, English, as a problematised context, is unavoidable for any study that looks at the GGS from the vantage point of the Western diaspora. Furthermore, translation from SLS/Panjabi to a Western language, is already implied in such thinking. This diasporic hybridity, of an 'internally translative' Western/Sikh self, challenges any thinking based on the simple either-or assumption between the Western outsider who is 'capable of reason' (*theoria*) and Eastern insider who is 'advantaged by faith' (*praxis*), since these hybrid Asians are both and neither. Therefore the polarisation between Singh Sabha exegesis and Western academic narration and historicisation is seen as a false dichotomy that elides their shared assumptions, derived from colonialism, English education and migration.

It is therefore incumbent upon Sikhs to acknowledge their Western inculturation, although this is often naively assumed not to matter or come into play when looking at the GGS even when it is in English translation. The question of what is being lost and gained from SLS to English seems not to have been asked. This chapter goes a little way in addressing the problematic issue of translation. The Eastern contexts of the text are in a conflating relationship with the Western contexts of the interpreter (as they have been since the Singh Sabha reforms), and thus raise the obvious need not only for dialogical bridge-terms but also cross-cultural themes.

Since this is a textual study issues of translation are central. Not only is translation involved in the broadest sense of interpretation and understanding, but in the specific sense of textual exchange and transformation. What occurs in translation? How is one to translate 'faithfully'? To investigate these questions I look at the work of Nida, Pound, Benjamin, and the issues of equivalence, original meaning and invariance.

Although it is important that research in translation studies should inform this chapter, it should also be acknowledged that no overall consensus on any one theory is posited (Mukherjee 1981: 23). This is not necessarily problematic; diversity need not point to a lack of clarity. Indeed, such a homogenisation and simplification of a plenitude of views on this subject, from a Wittgensteinian and Foucauldian view, can only come across as either ideologically motivated and/or intellectually repressive. This section looks at various definitions of translation and concludes that the loadedness, and indeed idealism, of the term is better replaced by more action-specific phrases such as 'creative transposition'.

The second half of this chapter looks at interpretation in the light of Gadamerian hermeneutics. His views are particularly relevant given his three categories of understanding, interpretation, and application, which together involve the fusing of two broad horizons, in this case of Western hermeneutics and Eastern textual *praxes*. Profound issues of incommensurability however surround cross-cultural translation. This approach argues that translation and interpretation are in this context meaningful and possible, but not without a number of important qualified innovations. Whilst the universality of hermeneutics is not accepted by all, hermeneutic ideas are understood to provide a fruitful and appropriate avenue for opening discussion. The intention is not to take Gadamer's 'philosophical hermeneutics' as a method, but as a pointer to a possible and fruitful engagement for diasporic Sikhs. Gadamer's interpretive 'application' is indicative of the shift to *praxis*, and his use of Aristotle's *phronesis* (ethical know-how) parallels central traits found in the upayic thematic, which are particularly illuminating with regards to the *gura-sabadu praxis*. Such

parallels will aid the aim of developing a contextual hermeneutics that links an Anglo-Sikh interpreter with a Panjabi text.

2.1. Understanding translation

Jakobson categorises three main areas of translation:

- i) *Intralingual*: interpretive rewording of signs in one language with signs from the same language.
- ii) *Interlingual*: interpretive translation of signs in one language with signs from another language.
- iii) *Intersemiotic*: interpretive transmutation of signs in one language to non-verbal signs; i.e. from language into art or music. (1959: 232–9).

In the case of the GGS and Gurū Nānak's *gura-sabadu praxis*, all three are inter-related: the *intralingual* translation of the GGS is seen in the various indigenous interpretive traditions (*praṇālīs*), the *intersemiotic* translation consists of devotional singing (*kīratanu*), ideally backed by the musical performance of the GGS's thirty-one melodies (*rāgas*), into meditative recitation (*japu*, *simaraṇa*) and oral exegesis (*kathā*) and *vice versa*. And finally the *interlingual* translation from written *Guramukhi*/SLS⁴ to written English (comprising various Western, orientalist, as well as indigenous Sikh, translations into English). However this thesis limits itself to the latter *interlingual* translation – the most problematic given the complexity of the cross-cultural encounter. Though the intralingual and intersemiotic are not directly engaged with here, they do form part of my Sikh *praxis*, and do, in unspecified ways, influence the interlingual translation.

Given the interlingual contexts (of diaspora and conventional academic study) there is a danger, without treatment of the other two modes, to reduce translation into a semantic process which sacrifices form on the altar of content. Given further that many Sikhs believe that it is impossible to interpret the GGS into English, the argument against interpretation must be taken seriously. The focus on content alone with scant regard for the contextual form(s) has been noted by Sontag who argues against such semantic-led interpretation, for it produces, she argues, a 'shadow world of meanings':

By reducing the work of art to its content and then interpreting *that*, one tames the work of art... That interpretation is not simply the compliment that mediocrity pays to genius. It is, indeed *the* modern way of understanding something, and is applied to works of every quality. (1994: 8–9).

But can understanding be approached or achieved other than by some kind of interpretation? It is precisely where Sontag generalises her argument, as her title

⁴ *Guramukhi* strictly refers to the script, not the language of the GGS, hence Shackle's 'SLS' phrase.

‘against interpretation’ suggests, that insurmountable difficulties arise. Sontag seems naively to share in a romanticism that yearns for an originary, pre-interpretive world that can be ‘experienced directly’:

To interpret is to impoverish, to deplete the world—in order to set up a shadow world of ‘meanings’... The world, our world, is depleted, impoverished enough. Away with all duplicates of it, until we again experience more immediately what we have. (1994: 7).

Whilst a laudable point it refers to much more than mere abstraction, and as such her flight from meaning becomes untenable, if not impossible: the ecstatic experience of ‘transparence’, the experience of the ‘luminosity of things themselves’ (1994:13) is always already situated in a variety of historical and interpretive trajectories. Thus to replace hermeneutics with her ‘erotics of art’ is to wish, again, for timeless ‘truths’ or experiences of content without context. Can art exist without context? What of the limiting frames as well the pictured forms?

In place of a reductive hermeneutics of meaning, Sontag argues that her ‘erotics of art’ is where the ‘function of criticism should be to show *how it* [text, art work] is *what it is*, even *that it is what it is*, rather than to show *what it means*. In place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art’ (1994: 14). The focus on how things are what they are, involving their *praxis*, and not on what they represent or mean (*theoria*), is to be welcomed. But how to achieve this change in focus is not explained. If this study were to treat the GGS as though its only meaning was its ‘semantic-literal’ one, then a reductive injustice would be committed of the kind Sontag delineates. However, the approach here does not understand the semantic interpretation as the only means of engaging with the text; singing, recitation, remembrance, contemplation and worship are in different ways and degrees integrated with the semantic. Yet the very format of the academic thesis itself favours the semantic and theoretical. Nevertheless, and interestingly, the semantic level within the Sikh tradition itself is without doubt of primary importance, given the Gurūs’ own criticism of any ritualisation of religious practice in empty recitation or song, of any aesthetics without concrete application. Nevertheless the escape from thought as well the stronghold of thought itself are both criticised, and yet accepted and employed by Gurū Nānak.

However, the weakest point in Sontag’s essay is her omission of the central tenet of interpretation: the hermeneutic circle and the linguistic nature of human ‘being/becoming’ – which both contextualise Nietzsche’s claim that there are no facts, only interpretations, and in regard to Heidegger, situates his existential being-in-the-world. Heidegger and Gadamer try with their hermeneutics to do exactly the opposite of what Sontag argues occurs in interpretation understood only as a semantic act of the mind. Through the acknowledgment of the wider socio-linguistic context and cultural

pre-understandings, they argue that the very limits of one's 'meanings' are significantly predisposed by inherited interpretive frames. And their hermeneutic approaches are explicitly based on keeping open the process of engagement rather than bracketing out previous understandings in a vain attempt to arrive at the closure of 'form' into 'content' in absolute interpretation. It is therefore confusing and quite untenable to argue for a distinction between interpretation in the 'broad' sense on the one hand and as something quite specific as a mental act on the other. Revealing a significant climb-down in her argument 'against interpretation' she states:

Of course, I don't mean interpretation in the broadest sense, the sense in which Nietzsche (rightly) says, 'There are no facts, only interpretations'. By interpretation, I mean here a conscious act of the mind which illustrates a certain code, certain 'rules' of interpretation. (Sontag 1994: 5).

The contentious claim that interpretation impoverishes the world actually arises from her overly simplistic definition of interpretation as a particular act of the mind. Yet not all interpretation is semantically reductive. Though Sontag rejects the distinction between form and content as illusory, it is plain her whole essay works on maintaining the primacy of form over content, as though interpretation is somehow a secondary activity to the primal experience of art.

Sontag's romantic gesture to allow the art piece to speak for itself is therefore naive. This is revealing of the second major weakness of her argument; she elides the relationship between interpretation and translation, let alone interpretation and understanding. Is there ever an occasion when a thing speaks for itself, when it is not 'replaced by something else'? Is one not conditioned by a particular socio-linguistic culture to interpret in particular ways? Indeed, are not language, translation and interpretation inseparable from understanding and experience? For certain, Steiner would see her 'against interpretation' as oxymoronic:

Translation is formally and pragmatically implicit in *every* act of communication... be it in the widest semiotic sense or in more specifically verbal exchanges. To understand is to decipher. To hear significance is to translate. (1992: xii).

Against Sontag, and for interpretation in the general sense of Steiner's translation, i.e., as integral with lived experience, the argument here must analyse, through three important figures, what is meant by the specific case of textual translation before turning to the interpretive aspect of such translation in general.

Nida, Pound and Benjamin

Eugene Nida's work on translation has been widely acknowledged, especially in the field of biblical studies. Although his work is now seen to be more or less superseded

by recent theories, it remains relevant to this study. Gentzler (1993: 45–62) points out the main criticisms of Nida's work, showing how he based his functional (behaviour-response) theory of translation upon the work of Noam Chomsky. Nida simplified Chomsky's three-tiered system into a dual one wherein he claimed the existence of universals or 'kernels' at a deep level of all languages that could be detected, translated or matched for the 'same' kernels in the target language. These universals, once found in the target language (English), were 'transformed' to the 'surface' level, thus producing the 'same' response effect of the original (GGS text) on its original audience (Nida 1964: 68). This is seen now to be highly idealistic since these universal structures are only assumed to exist, and as such are theoretically dubious, especially when one considers that Chomsky (1965: 30) himself was reticent to make claims for universal translatability.

Words, for Nida, are symbols that disguise the real meaning and message that lie deep within their related structure. In as much as his goal was behavioural, to elicit a particular religious response in the readers, and not epistemological, Nida's approach is of interest. In privileging the response to the sign, and not the sign itself like Chomsky, Nida looks forward to the future effects of translation. Likewise those lacking SLS who listen to expositions of the GGS in the diaspora, ultimately do so only on account of their understanding of the soteriological function of the text in English. In this regard a translation that is not cognisant of the possible response of the reader will remain inadequate.

Nida, in stressing functional, dynamic equivalence over formal correspondence and literal meaning, such that it is not *what* a language communicates but *how* it communicates, not what the sign says but what the sign can be made to say, relegates the source language (here SLS) beneath the target language (here English). The context in which the 'revealed' message is to be heard becomes the primary determinant of the translation (Nida 1960: 87). However, Nida's evangelism, wherein the accessibility to the original message and its translation is naively assumed, can hardly escape criticism today. Indeed, Gentzler sees Nida's work as an anti-intellectual pseudo-theory wherein intuition, faith and absolute trust, become the major determinants. For Gentzler, Nida does not offer a theory of translation, rather one should 'trust the theologian and pray that God will provide the answer' (1993: 57–8).

This seems most akin to the way translation has been perceived by Singh Sabha intellectuals indebted to the considerable labours of one European, arguably the father of the Singh Sabha reform movement, Arthur Max Macauliffe. To them the most important marker of identity was their religiosity and absolute faith in scripture and heritage. Indeed they saw Western scholars as lacking in what they considered to be an essential quality—that is, reverence for the scripture and belief in its authenticity. Like

Nida's moral agenda, the Singh Sabha's didactic mission established an orthodox interpretation. Hence only certain individuals gained authority in GGS exegesis: Bhāi Gurdās Bhalla, Bhāi Nand Lāl, and their own prolific writers like Sāhib Singh, Kāhn Singh Nābhā and Bhāi Vīr Singh. These were respected scholars, but respected because of their faith and devotion, as much as for their erudition.

Nida seems to posit an 'omnipotent reader', i.e. the 'ideal missionary' who, believed himself to have access to the 'original meanings' of the sayings of past prophets, via the scripture in his hand. Certainly Gentzler's (1993: 60) criticism of Nida's assumption of the knowability of both the original message (i.e. that which comes from a higher source) and its effect on the source and target audiences can be extended to the Singh Sabha scholars. The latter assumed they knew the Gurūs' intended meanings, and actively promulgated their interpretations to create such a response amongst the wider community as would match their visions of the Gurūs' (interpreted) ideals. But their interpretations all occurred within, and were therefore coloured by, the specific contexts of the colonial encounter. Today, the contexts of diaspora Sikhs are radically different, with a whole range of new issues that demand further or alternative interpretations.

Most theorists to date disagree with the idea central to Nida's theory that the original message can be determined, let alone translated to have the same effect in the target culture as in the original source culture. Nida's abstract reductionism and transcendental idealism render the message ahistorical, unified and universal. Whilst Nida's approach of discerning 'kernels' is unacceptable, his idea that knowing without acting, or interpreting without being affected, is important; for one of the purposes of reading scripture is not simply to know its truths but to be transformed by them.

Nida's emphasis not on what a word means but what its meaning can be used for, supports an upayic perspective, where the focus lies within its soteriological efficacy. And hence the parallel here with the importance of the Gurū; others may translate the GGS and be informative about its linguistic structure, but only the Gurū's words are understood as religiously transformative, given his skill in adapting the text's teaching to suit his diverse listeners.

Pound's theory of luminous detail, being based on the concept of energy in language, appears to be relevant in this transformative respect. Here the translator is an artist, a poet who makes words. Translation requires the skill to recapture energy patterns 'given out' by the source text to freely express the 'luminous detail' of words, so that the translation gives sudden insight into the core movements of the text. As such, Pound did not emphasise literal meanings and lexical equivalencies, but rhythm, diction, cadence and the pulsation of words—qualities in most poetic and hymnal texts.

Pound saw words as 'electrified cones' that were charged with 'the power of tradition, of centuries of race consciousness, of agreement, of association' (Gentzler 1993: 20). The characteristic debate of form versus mood, literal versus poetic translation, is repeated here but with the addition of the historical resonance of meaning embedded in language. The force or dominant 'images' coming through words, which he saw as an evolving system of 'clusters' of energies or 'nodes', were what Pound sought to capture and express. He thus goes beyond simple semantic equivalence: 'the Vorticist [as translator] relies not upon similarity or analogy, not upon likeness or mimicry... An image is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time' (Pound 1914: 153–4). Thus, whilst neither reducing nor fixing meaning to specific forms and syntactical structures, since meaning changes as language changes, Pound saw words as *things-in-movement*. Their processes, interrelations and compoundedness were to him parts of a changing network of feelings. This allowed Pound as poet the freedom to skilfully sculpt 'images' that voiced musical (*melopoeia*), visual (*phanopoeia*) and intellectual play (*logopoeia*) of words 'in their attitudes', time and context. Pound also embeds the true meaning or intention of the author in the words, or text, so that the translator's task is to seek out and carry over these illuminous details; 'Tain't what a man sez, but wot he 'means' that the traducer has to bring over' (Pound 1950: 271). This is not unlike Nida, who assumes that the author's intentions lie hidden in the text and that it is these intentions that should be the focus of the translator and not the text itself. Yet by what other means is the debate about the author's intentions possible, but by those very inscriptions of the text?

Nevertheless, the cross-cultural question still remains: can English provide a suitable linguistic range and structure to emulate, and capture the poetic movements and rhythms of SLS? Does not the focus on an 'image' rather side step the complex problems of representation? If translation is not done through representation, likeness, analogy, or mimicry, then by what means is it achieved? Simply relying on nebulous concepts as an 'image', or an 'intellectual and emotional complex in an instant in time' seems to provide Pound the license he needs to say what he wants to say, rather than secure any fidelity to the linguistic flesh of the text and its communicative movements. Pound's theory sets 'high' if not idealistic standards, perhaps unworkable for anyone who is not a poet in both English and SLS, and who has not learned how to dance skilfully between the two, as well as marry them.

However, Pound's desire to recreate new relations between the target and source languages, via a fluid movement (a mode of continuity and re-presentation that is in tune with the 'giving out' of the source text's 'luminous detail') is of value with regard to 'sacred texts', and is similar to Benjamin's idea that the source text continues

as an 'afterlife' in the translation. Benjamin believes that without such translations keeping the text's movement alive, not only the source text, but language itself, would atrophy and die.

Benjamin is important here because he emphasises the idea that the translation registers the continued life of the original—a continuity beyond equivalence that has been intimated; 'a translation issues from the original – not so much from its life as from its afterlife' (1992: 72), again emphasising the importance of the interpreter 'in front' of the text. His work is relevant for (opposing Nida) he disclaims any translation that tries to take into account an assumed audience,

In the appreciation of a work of art or an art form, consideration of the receiver never proves fruitful... No poem is intended for the reader, no picture for the beholder, no symphony for the listener. (Benjamin 1992: 70).

Echoing Sontag, this is primarily because the literary work,

... 'tells' very little to those who understand it. Its essential quality is not statement or the imparting of information. Yet any translation which intends to perform a transmitting function cannot transmit anything but information – hence, something inessential. This is the hallmark of bad translations. (Benjamin 1992: 70).

This can readily be seen in the case of the GGS. Neither Trumpp's (1989) nor Macauliffe's (1993) translation of the Gurū Granth Sāhib does justice to the original's vibrancy and sheer poetic resonance, given their bent on transmitting the 'meaning' of the text. Though Trumpp's version, being more literally 'translative' suffers far less from the conscious imposition of an ideological interpretation than do Macauliffe's and later Gopal Singh's versions (1993).

Trying to transmit or communicate a 'divine understanding' through other words, less poetic and selected by an 'unenlightened mind', is to severely underestimate the task at hand. Indeed the idea of transmission, whether of meaning or of form, is seen in Benjamin's view as reductionistic and misguided. Instead he views accomplished translation as a mode of its own kind involving renewal and transformation, and in this goes far beyond Sontag's simple disclaimer:

... no translation would be possible if in its ultimate essence it strove for likeness to the original. For in its afterlife – which could not be called that if it were not a transformation and a renewal of something living – the original undergoes a change. Even words with fixed meaning can undergo a maturing process... Translation is so far removed from being the sterile equation of two dead languages that of all literary forms it is the one charged with the special mission of watching over the maturing process of the original language and the birth pangs of its own... If the kinship of languages manifests itself in translations, this is not accomplished through a vague likeness between adaptation and original. It stands to reason that kinship does not necessarily involve likeness. (Benjamin 1992: 73–4).

Interlingual translations are far more susceptible to the myth of 'likeness' than intralingual ones, heightening the need to 'watch over the maturing process' of the original language (SLS), and yet guard the translation's 're-birth pangs' (into English). Within the Sikh context who is capable of performing such a translation beyond a mere transmitting function? The answer to this must lie in the *guru-celā* relation, which the text itself speaks of under the trope of two modes of being, illumined (*Guramukhi*) and ignorant (*Manamukhi*). For a translation of the GGS to have an 'afterlife' would presuppose that the interpreter enjoyed an 'awakened' (*jāgu*) consciousness, as indeed Gurū Nānak's works can be seen to have 'true' afterlife in the works of the later Gurūs, precisely because of their acknowledged awakened status, though in each case only intralingual translation was in question.

Given the inherent problems of interlingual translation in the sense of an afterlife, the focus here is limited to that of an interpretive commentary. Indeed it is often the case that a translation provides little source for engagement in another language, highlighting the important role interpretive commentaries can and do play as supportive if not substitutive texts. Furthermore it is the blind spot in respect of the various ideological frameworks of interpretive exposition that is the precise focus of this thesis' critique of other 'translations' of the GGS. The translations themselves are not criticised *per se*, but rather the presuppositions that lie behind them and the ideological mould which they are supposed to espouse. It would thus be futile to render another 'translation' (whether literal or poetic) without an investigation into the translation process itself. That the GGS can speak in English cannot simply be assumed, as though that 'speaking' will naturally and innocently occur simply because the scripture is translated; for translation is an art and interpretation its sycophant. There is then a greater kinship found within the context of the interpretive commentary and the ideas generated there with the ideas in the GGS, than in any relationship between SLS and English translation. It is not what the GGS is translated to be, but what it is interpreted to be saying from various positions, that captures the focus of this thesis.

Therefore a literal, word-focused (though not by any means definitive) translation is favoured here, for it allows greater awareness of the diversity of terms and ideas in the GGS, thereby aiding the deconstruction of any Christian ideological bias inherited through colonial times and internalised by the Singh Sabha exegetes. The aim is to look again at Gurū Nānak's words but without presupposing either the received interpretation of academic scholarship nor bowing down to traditional narratives. Gentzler states that both Benjamin and Pound ask that we 'translate not by using whole or unified categories, which invariably reinforce existing generic distinctions, but instead proceed word-by-word or image-by-image. Only then can

foreign cultural elements enter our own discourse and begin to break down our limited cultural conceptions, ensuring our growth' (1993: 166). Given the need for context sensitivity this approach is largely followed in the translations of the GGS, offered here, which are based on a thorough analysis of Gurū Nānak's vocabulary.

The aim here then is to allow the target language to incorporate the 'first-impression-alienness' of the source language by a double movement, which simultaneously interrupts, challenges and to some extent changes, its own constructed realities by the presence of those foreign elements. However, whilst Benjamin is solely concerned with languages where all translation is only a somewhat 'provisional way of coming to terms with the foreignness of languages' (Benjamin 1992: 75), he does not seem to adequately consider the interpretive (ideological) frameworks under which translations operate. The greater context, for instance, in the case of Asian texts, is of an orientalism fed by imperialism and colonialism, and the various socio-political frames engendered by these. Here, as Niranjana argues, translation operates as an instrumental tool of the Empire, a significant 'technology' of colonial domination (1992: 35, 172). Translation, itself, 'brings into being overarching concepts of reality and representation', such that, translation thus 'produces strategies of containment' (Niranjana:1992: 2-3).

Niranjana is not simply talking about translation as an interlingual process but as 'an entire problematic' that is situated within historically embedded relations of power and control, that feeds 'obsessions and desires' (1992: 8-9). It then becomes important to keep the vigilance that Benjamin urges in more ways than the purely textual. For Benjamin the translator is neither Nida's missionary, nor Pound's poet, but a scholar whose task it is to find the 'echo' of the intended effect from the source language on the target language in terms of kinship not likeness:

The task of the translator consists in finding that intended effect upon the language into which he is translating which produces in it the echo of the original. This is a feature of translation which basically differentiates it from the poet's work, because the effort of the latter is never directed at the language as such, at its totality, but solely and immediately at specific linguistic contextual aspects... The intention of the poet is spontaneous, primary, graphic; that of the translator is derivative, ultimate, ideational. (Benjamin 1992: 77).

However, this 'echo' must be differently understood if it is to be applied to the GGS. Benjamin elucidates the fact that the poetic sense cannot be reduced only to its reproduced meaning. Such reproduced meanings are inclined to attempt the transmission of something which, in both Benjamin's and Sontag's eyes, would merely be inessential information. But this only holds within the context of the translation of a text as canon, not within the context of the interpretation of a text as commentary, wherein the transmission of meaning in the question and answer dialogue between

Gurū and *Sikh* is not at all understood negatively as reductive or inessential. Both Benjamin and Sontag seem to view the text at some distance, as an object to be re-crafted without imitation or engagement, whereas the 'tradition-text' requires location within a field of *praxis*.

The task here then is not primarily translation, but commentary, and hence hermeneutics. The aim is not to find the echo of the GGS in the form of another translation as an afterlife of the original, but to hear that echo in the form of an appropriate commentary and *praxis*, and following Niranjana simultaneously critique past ideologically-warped interpretations. This process therefore does not involve language as its sole passive 'material', but rather traditions of understandings and applications, both Eastern and Western. Benjamin and Sontag may want to refrain from communicating 'inessential information', but the need to communicate something of value strikes at the heart of the *guru-celā* text-tradition, where a reformulative exegesis is the norm, and where such exegesis is inseparable from *praxis*. Benjamin's and Sontag's critiques are, however, applicable to those scholars who translate and interpret (only once) the songs into prose and formulate a theological system – as though they have 'finally' captured what the GGS 'ultimately' means. It is such problematic assumptions of the presumed availability of 'original meaning', and translation according to theories of equivalence between languages, and the lack of interpretive invariance that must now be discussed. For translation and interpretation of the GGS speak not of a single task, but of a process and duty without end: the continual need for current engagement, of bringing the text into present lived-experience.

Equivalence, original meaning and invariance

Equivalence largely refers to a levelling of semantic content regardless of form. Both Pound and Benjamin differ from Nida in that their notion of translation transcends mere equivalence and the imitation of 'fixed eternal' meanings. Translating in accordance with equivalence presents a difficult, if not impossible, task of covering all meanings and synonyms of a given word, whilst ultimately excluding all but one. How is one to decide which meaning stands? And by what criteria is this choice made? As Holmes (1973–4) notes, there is a decision process both conscious and subconscious which establishes a hierarchy of correspondences depending upon certain initial choices. As one makes a choice a new set of choices make themselves apparent and the process continues so that the translation eventually begins to generate choices of its own. None of these choices are right or wrong but all close certain possibilities and open others. Holmes (1973–4: 78) elucidates how subjective decisions and their 'accidental' outcomes are determinative in any translation process. Given the

impossibility of establishing universal standards to inform translation in search of equivalencies, it should therefore be acknowledged from the outset that, for translation to occur at all, it must involve creative and sensitive (appropriate) choices.

The 'naive' assumption that equivalencies are backed by underlying universals, has also been criticised by Sapir who claims that no 'two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached' (1956: 69). This view can easily be overstated, leading to an imprisonment within one's socio-linguistic frame. Despite Wittgenstein's 'the limits of my language are the limits of my world', Heidegger's 'language is the house of Being', and Gadamer's 'all understanding is essentially linguistic', these three philosophers also acknowledge the possibility of communicating with the Other, since they all understand communicative engagement as being inherently interpretive and open-ended.

If equivalence is to be meaningful, a fixed, stable reference must be assumed. It is precisely this that post-Saussurean linguistic critiques disclaim. For them language is not a system made up of a referential semantics, but constitutes a semantics of internal relations; language does gain its meaning from referring to external objects, but from differences generated between meanings within language itself, thus pointing to Wittgenstein's 'use' defining 'meaning', not reference, paralleling also the Buddhist understanding of a non-cognitive, non-referential language.

The recovery of an 'original meaning' then is a misnomer, because meaning is not an object as conceived by a referential understanding of language: language does not point to the meaning that simply needs to be seen and communicated; rather meaning is enacted and negotiated through *praxis*; through some form of engagement (be it conversation, reading, contemplation, or singing), with language as use. Meaning arises as part of an engaged process and finds itself expressed in a range of interpretive traditions. Such a process has little to do with the discovery of absolute meanings or truths that are assumed to be universal and simply require restating, but more about re-creating 'ways of coping' with the world through *praxis*. Indeed, Pound and Benjamin (amongst others) redefine translation as something more akin to transformation, but a transformation governed by certain constraints and invariant codes.

The very specificity of form and content, (as well as culture and language, let alone ideology and style) establishes various limits; Gurū Nānak and his location (in the above frames) set the parameters of a certain invariance not easily accessed or simplified. When the translator comes to interpret the text, s/he is not licensed to interpret as s/he likes, but is constrained by those patterns of invariance embedded in

particular grammatical formulations, historic formations and cultural practices. This invariance reveals itself, then, not within a fixed albeit uncoded law but within a movement of a number of possible responses. Within that range, which can never be definitively expressed, however, any number of possible engagements could occur. Interpretation, as understood here, aims to sense that complex invariance, i.e. the limits and boundaries of the movement out from the source text, and to operate within those limits to produce a possible and likely interpretation, never the one and only interpretation.⁵ The GGS is what it is only within the context of how it has been understood and used; it has no meaning by itself, that is as a book on a library shelf or as an internet text – though these meanings are fast becoming part of its present context, or expanding invariance. The interpretive invariance of any given text then cannot be absolutely and objectively stated. The parameters of any textual invariance change within the context of its use and application.

In the above a historical movement of translation has been traced from being a simple act of an individual's interpretation of one fixed entity to another, to a fluid process of transformation that involves complex collective forces and constraints. These shifts include a movement away from the focus on identity and reference to how meaning travels by its difference and enactment; from static text to dynamic context; from translation as reflection, mirroring and copying to translation as refraction and transformation.⁶ Jakobson's (1959) terminological preference of translation as 'creative transposition' is important here, since it indicates a kind of 'rewriting', a 'shaping force' that operates according to various standards of power and manipulation, as well as personal prejudice, and can be both positive and negative. In contemporary theory the translator's presence is always detectable, his mark on the translation can no longer be hidden. However, such marks do not negate translatability, but only situate it within a sphere of psycho-social relations that demand self-awareness and responsibility. Such evidence of personal prejudice neither invalidates translation nor does it offer an interpretative licence, but speaks of an order and style of engagement. The translator, if his own context is to be acknowledged, has a duty to differ organically from the original, but that duty is an ethical one bound to the constraints of the echoing of the text within its tradition(s) (religious and scholarly).

Given that the translation of Gurū Nānak's hymns is a task that is to be done largely 'before' an interpretive commentary can fully proceed, it is transparent that any interpretation of those hymns will already be embedded within a specific matrix of inherited assumptions, values and prejudices; for ideology is not only formed after translation but precedes it by influencing initial selections. To counter this bias, one

⁵ There are parallels with this notion of invariance in Broeck's use of Peirce's 'types and tokens', as well as Neubert's 'translational relativity'. See Gentzler 1993: 77ff, and pp.69–71, respectively.

⁶ See Lefevere 1975, 1978.

needs to acknowledge the importance of the 'hermeneutic circle' or the interrelations between part and whole, to understanding in general. Therefore the whole corpus of Gurū Nānak's hymns was studied in mutually informing part-whole relations. Hermeneutic theory argues that the relation between translation and interpretation is difficult to separate, that both are in fact contiguous and circular. Hence, the need to look more seriously at hermeneutics and its circle of understanding. Not only is the text to be situated as the *gura-sabadu praxis*, but also the interpreter is to be brought into the equation of translation, interpretation and understanding, as a creative transposer of Gurū Nānak's speech into a diasporic present.

2.2. Understanding interpretation

Situating hermeneutics⁷: Gadamer

The previous section sought to problematise any treatment of interpretation that elides translation. It should be clear now that any hermeneutics that sets itself up as a method or theory to enable a transmitting function is also rejected – since the Sikh context of the Word is tied to lived experience. It is in this respect that a 'philosophical hermeneutics', that deals with an ontology of understanding which concerns the notion of *praxis*, is far more relevant to the focus of the thesis and the GGS.

In opposition to Schleiermacher's hermeneutics as an 'art of objective understanding' of all texts sacred or secular, or Dilthey's romantic hermeneutics as the method of understanding in the social and human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*) rather than the explanatory bias of the natural sciences (*Naturwissenschaften*), a 'philosophical hermeneutics' follows Heidegger, whose critique of an ideal subjectivism led him to postulate the temporal nature of human being (*Dasein*, 'There Being') as a being-in-the-world that is always already 'thrown' into existence. Here understanding as interpretation is not something additional (that human beings can do along side other acts), but is integral with every act. This 'thrownness' always exists as possibility, viz., understanding constitutes projections of being and as such is radically open-ended, but also and perhaps more importantly, understanding is historicised such that metaphysical 'Truth' is understood via a diversity of historically lived truths.

Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, which builds upon Heidegger's work, if not (mis)construed as a method and understood as a Western dialogical partner, could prove fruitful for cross-cultural interpretation. A philosophical hermeneutic perspective, once contextualised, attempts to couple thinking with acting, to help inform what would constitute a meaningful engagement with the GGS from a Western contextualised space.

⁷ For the historical genesis of hermeneutics see: Palmer 1969; Ormiston & Schrift 1990a, 1990b.

Given the existential structure of understanding, interpretation is never presuppositionless. Rather understanding is constituted by 'fore-structures'. The event of new knowledge then does not occur outside these fore-structures (composed of one's presuppositions). Gadamer, following Heidegger, understands knowledge in terms of these 'fore-structures' as 'prejudices', and criticises the Enlightenment 'prejudice against prejudice' and *ipso facto* its denial of the historicity of human existence and knowledge itself:

It is not so much our judgements as it is our prejudices that constitute our being... Prejudices are not necessarily unjustified and erroneous, so that they inevitably distort the truth. In fact, the historicity of our existence entails that prejudices, in the literal sense of the word, constitute the initial directedness of our whole ability to experience. Prejudices are biases of our openness to the world. They are simply conditions whereby we experience something – whereby what we encounter says something to us. (Gadamer 1976: 9).

Given that there is no knowledge without preconceptions and prejudices, the task is not to remove all such preconceptions, but to test and 'develop' them critically in the course of inquiry. But how are blind and enabling prejudices to be distinguished? Gadamer opposes Descartes' monological approach of pure rational self-reflection, in favour of a dialogical interaction with the Other, which 'makes a claim upon us', and through that very communication one's own prejudices are challenged.

Given that, 'understanding is, essentially, a historically effected event' (Gadamer 1993: 299), and since one's prejudices are part of an 'effective history' (*Wirkungsgeschichte*), then to understand at all one has to understand differently (Gadamer 1993: 296–7). Furthermore, this historicity of understanding also implies that understanding can never reach completion or finality. Being immersed in historical action there is an implied continuity where 'knowledge of oneself can never be complete' (Gadamer 1993: 302). This acknowledges the fact that prejudiced existence, understanding and knowledge being historical, are taken to be movements through time; a mode of interpretation manifesting in the form of the hermeneutic circle, where every part (of a text) is only comprehensible within the context of the whole and yet, the whole itself is only comprehensible in the light of its parts. Yet this historical movement is not strictly circular, but potentially spiral (due to the temporal nature of existence) where disabling prejudices can be transformed to facilitate a growth in understanding.

If one is always already situated, if understanding always takes place within the context of prior understandings, then the distance between the text and interpreter cannot be dismissed as negligible. If subjectivity is historicised in terms of temporality, interpretation (or rather the interpreter) can no longer transcend its (his/her) own context and 'divine the original meaning' of a text, as early hermeneutic theories

attempted. Rather the relationship between the text and the interpreter occurs within the interpreter's context – hence the reason for contextualising the text and the process of interpretation:

Real historical thinking must take account of its own historicity. Only then will it cease to chase the phantom of a historical object that is the object of progressive research, and learn to view the object as the counterpart of itself and hence understand both. (Gadamer 1993: 299).

Gadamer sees meaning as accessed not from any discovery of original intention, but as emerging from an interactive engagement with text as part of a 'history of effects' that spills over into the present in the form of 'tradition'. Temporal distance is not to be overcome in a naive attempt of thinking with the ideas of past time periods independently from present ones. The two are related through a history of effects that in the Indian case would be carried by the commentarial traditions. Temporal distance is therefore a 'positive and productive condition enabling understanding' (Gadamer 1993: 297) and the meaning of the object of study to emerge, especially if the 'tradition-text' is recalled. Given that this temporal distance is not fixed and undergoes 'constant movement and extension', the discovery of the meaning of a text is never complete, but an 'infinite process' (1993: 298). Such a movement (of understanding) expresses an openness that allows not only a variety, but a continuity of interpretations, wherein one's prejudices are being perpetually revised. These prejudices both limit and furnish vision. If Gadamer's horizon is the 'range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point', then the diversity of possible perspectives makes the present horizon a dynamic process of redress and innovation. For Gadamer, then, 'understanding is always the fusion of these horizons' (1993: 302, 306):

The historical movement of human life consists in the fact that it is never absolutely bound to any one standpoint, and hence can never have a truly closed horizon. The horizon is, rather, something into which we move and that moves with us. Horizons change for a person who is moving. Thus the horizon of the past... is always in motion. (Gadamer 1993: 304).

Horizons, though finite in their situatedness, are always changing and fluid in their various engagements wherein prejudices are discovered and transformed. Yet, should *praxis* no longer revivify the tradition of understandings, vision becomes fixed, and the horizon is closed into a static abstraction; thereby the meaning of a text becomes fossilised, and a tradition becomes heritage. Gadamer sees such ossification of a tradition as a problem of application – 'the central problem of hermeneutics', found 'in all understanding' (1993: 307). When the truths of a tradition are no longer translated and lived, but idolised and worshipped, then the argument that *praxis* should dominate *theoria*, not *vice versa* becomes relevant. The insights of philosophical

hermeneutics, that parallel many ideas concerning the skilful means theme (the historicity and incompleteness of knowledge and understanding, the perspectives of self-reflexive and changing horizons and transformation of prejudices, etc.), are nowhere more impressive than in this aspect of application. This focus on application as the core of hermeneutics relates well with Gurū Nānak's emphasis on the practice of being true (*praxis*) over the statement of truth (*theoria*); knowledge and *praxis* are co-dependent. Their separation results in metaphysics and theology, both understood as maps with an increasingly archaic relation to reality, distant from the event of lived experience:

In both legal and theological hermeneutics there is an essential tension between the fixed text – the law or the gospel – on the one hand and, on the other, the sense arrived at by applying it at the concrete moment of interpretation, either in judgment or in preaching. A law does not exist in order to be understood historically, but to be concretized in its legal validity by being interpreted. Similarly, the gospel does not exist in order to be understood as a merely historical document, but to be taken in such a way that it exercises its saving effect. This implies that the text, whether law or gospel, if it is to be understood properly – i.e., according to the claim it makes – must be understood at every moment, in every concrete situation, in a new and different way. Understanding here is always application... *understanding proves to be an event.* (Gadamer: 309).

Similarly, the words in the GGS are to be understood at every moment of 'actualising' the Word in *praxis*. Chapter 4 takes up this point of understanding texts according to the 'claims they make' seriously, and aims to develop a less generic and more 'contextual' hermeneutics. Furthermore, that every new moment and context demands a new and different understanding, relates a process of perpetual reconstitution and speaks of a type of knowledge a skilful means thematic would imply, as well as of a Gadamerian hermeneutics that integrates interpretive application and *praxis* with *phronesis*.

Interpretation, *praxis* and *phronesis*

We have got on to slippery ice where there is no friction and so in a certain sense the conditions are ideal, but also, just because of that, we are unable to walk. We want to walk: so we need *friction*. Back to the rough ground! (Ludwig Wittgenstein 1968: 46).

An underlying opposition between *theoria* (ideal, abstraction) and *praxis* (action, 'friction') has been assumed throughout the discussion so far. It is now time to explore this assumption in some detail. Some contemporary philosophical debates (e.g. Dunne:1993) are framed in terms of a re-reading of Aristotle's important terms: *phronesis* and *techne*. Aristotle divides his philosophical musings along three broad categories: theoretical activity (*theoria*), political and moral activity (*praxis*), and

productive activity (*techne*). Within these categories it is the specific oppositions between theoretical knowledge (*episteme*, *theoria*) and practical knowledge (*techne*, *phronesis*) that concern this thesis. Even more acutely, a further duality draws out the special character of *praxis* that is sought to be paralleled with *upaya*, and that is between the ‘making’ of *techne* and the ‘acting’ of *phronesis*.

It is ironic that Greek philosophers on one the hand are held responsible for today’s modern ‘crisis’, and on the other, when solutions are sought, these same philosophers are made to speak with a different voice. A case in point is Aristotle who is held accountable by some for the division between theory and practice, leading to modernity’s dehumanised capitalism wherein an elite group of legislators commands a mass labour force.⁸ And yet he is seen by others as modernity’s saviour with his understandings of *phronesis*, a knowledge defined by him in detail as being inseparable from action.⁹

Arendt traces this distinction between knowing and doing in Plato’s separation of two terms that originally referred to action as one process: *archein* (beginning or opening up) and *prattein* (carrying through, accomplishing). The former comes to ‘rule over’ the latter. Arendt claims that Plato was the

... first to introduce the division between those who know and do not act and those who act and do not know, instead of the old articulation of action into beginning and achieving, so that knowing what to do and doing it become two altogether different performances. (1958: 223).

Dunne notes the political implications of such a linguistic change: knowledge coincides with rulership and command, and action with obedience and execution (1993:95). Arendt claims that Plato’s move ‘became authoritative for the whole [Western] tradition of political thought’, and has in fact ‘remained at the root of all theories of domination’ (1958: 225).¹⁰ There is then a tension between *theoria* and *praxis* on the one hand which involves a division between knowledge and action, and *techne* and *phronesis* on the other, entailing two conflicting forms of practical reason. And it is through Gadamer’s employment of *phronesis* as the paradigm for his hermeneutical

⁸ ‘Aristotle, departing from Plato and Socrates, established the independent disciplines and set Western tradition on the way to the radical theoretical/practical distinction, thereby setting the stage for modernity... The independent theoretical disciplines are only possible on the basis of a unique form of abstraction from the initial results of a reflection on immediate experience’. Smith 1996: 316. fn.9.

⁹ For example, Gadamer 1993: 312–24; Smith 1996: 289–91; Dunne: 1993 (who discusses J.H. Newman, H. Arendt, H-G. Gadamer and J. Habermas); Ricoeur (1992 174–8; 290–1) uses *phronesis* as a central motif in his study of ethical agency; and Bernstein: 1983.

¹⁰ Cf. ‘there seems to be a significant bias in Greek thought in favor of *theoria* over *praxis*... The modern faith in science, technology, industry and commerce replaces both [with *techne*]’. Smith 1996: 30–1. n.22.

understanding that the parallels with the skilful means theme become obvious as an alternative to Plato's hierarchical dualism.

Theoretical knowledge (*episteme*, *theoria*, *sophia*) yields demonstrability in the syllogistic form, and accounts for an object by tying it down to certain (presumed) principles (*archai*) or causes (*aitai*). These logical and idealistic abstractions lead to a comprehensive and exact knowledge (*sophia*), a knowledge for its own sake that concerns a being, order and harmony beyond time. This non-practical knowledge is seen to be difficult to comprehend yet sublime precisely because it transcends the realm of the senses (which Wittgenstein caricatures as like being on slippery ice). With this *theoria*, however, Aristotle contrasts a practical knowledge gained through the senses in action (Wittgenstein's preferred rough ground). Apart from this basic distinction between knowing and doing, the latter itself comprises two contrasting forms of 'non-theoretical' practice: *techne* and *phronesis*.¹¹ In the *Nicomachean Ethics* (7.10.1152a8–9; Barnes: 1984) Aristotle claims, 'a man has *phronesis* not by knowing only but by acting'.

Aristotle understands *techne* as a 'making', an activity concerned with production (*poiesis*), and *phronesis* as an 'acting', an activity that is inseparable from one's conduct within a wider context of a group, community, etc., as a citizen of the *polis*. *Techne* entails fabrication, producing an outcome (*telos*) that is finally divorced from the producer and his means, whereas *phronesis* is an activity whose very end is realised in the performance of the activity itself; the actor is inseparable from the action. *Techne* as a making requires skills and specialised knowledge which, though learned, may also be forgotten. *Phronesis*, however, is not a specific skill that can be learned nor can it be forgotten; it involves a personal and moral knowledge of how to live well and is acquired in relation to others. *Techne* resembles *episteme* as a form of knowledge and is therefore much closer to *theoria* than *phronesis*; whilst there may be a theorised *techne*, a theoretical *phronesis* is an oxymoron. Gadamer notes in this respect, 'I cannot really make sense of a *phronesis* that is supposed to be scientifically disciplined... I can imagine a scientific approach that is disciplined by *phronesis*' (in Bernstein 1983: 263). There is a precision and visible order to *techne* that *phronesis* lacks. *Phronesis* cannot therefore arise apart from one's own *praxis*, and therefore does not depend upon technical skill or theoretical method, and so cannot be predetermined:

The 'intellectual virtue' of *phronesis* is a form of reasoning, yielding a type of ethical know-how in which what is universal and what is particular are codetermined... [*phronesis*] is not to be identified with the type of 'objective knowledge' that is detached from one's own being and becoming. (Bernstein 1983: 146).

Gadamer's Hermeneutic *phronesis*

¹¹ The distinctions between these are taken from Dunne 1993, ch.8.

... hermeneutical consciousness is involved with neither technical nor moral knowledge, but these two types of knowledge still include *the same task of application* that we have recognised as the central problem of hermeneutics. (Gadamer 1993: 315).

Thus locating *praxis* at the heart of hermeneutics, Gadamer understands well that *phronesis* concerns a moral knowledge that has to be enacted, and that this action 'must include the application of knowledge to the particular task' (1993: 15). Comparing the craftsman and the moral agent, Gadamer makes an observation that reflects a 'skilful means' theme:

The task of making a moral decision is that of doing the right thing in a particular situation – i.e., seeing what is right within the situation and grasping it. He [moral person] too has to act, choosing the right means, and his conduct must be governed just as carefully as that of the craftsman. (1993: 317).

In comparing the craftsman and the moral person, Gadamer is re-organising the contrasts between *techne* and *phronesis* of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. This re-organisation rests upon three basic antitheses. Firstly, a skill (*techne*) can be learned and lost, but ethical know-how (*phronesis*) cannot. Unlike *techne*, *phronesis* involves one's whole being in relation to how one responds to a context in which others exist. Such knowledge cannot be applied to any situation, but arises from relations within particular situations; what is morally right cannot be determined independent of the context in which the question arises (Gadamer 1993: 317).

Developing such ideas further, Gadamer introduces the second contrast:

Where there is *techne*, we must learn it and then we are able to find the right means... Moral knowledge can never be knowable in advance like knowledge that can be taught. The relation between means and ends here is not such that one can know the right means in advance, and that is because the right end is not mere object of knowledge either. There can be no anterior certainty concerning what the good life is directed toward as a whole. (1993: 321).

The framework of means and end is ill-suited to understanding *phronesis* – since *phronesis* cannot be reduced to an enactment of means as though the end were entirely separate from those means. The right means arise from being immersed in the situation of action itself. Unlike technical activity, the means of *phronesis* have to be worked out anew on each occasion, and there can be no prior knowledge of what they will be. There is therefore an inherent uncertainty and ambiguity with this theme. Yet it is precisely within this uncertainty, this movement over the 'rough ground', that lies the difficult power of transformation.

Phronesis demands self-transformation through contact with others. When *theoria* dominates *praxis* the self, group, institution remain unchallenged, accepted as

givens; yet when *praxis/phronesis* leads *theoria/techne/episteme*, then the same are challenged to sport change. This awareness of others characterises Gadamer's third use of Aristotle's contrasts between *phronesis* and *techne*, where the former, unlike the latter, requires an understanding of other beings. Unlike the producer of a product the moral agent 'is constituted through the actions which disclose him both to others and to himself as the person that he is' (Dunne 1993: 263). And as such, *phronesis* must be distinguished from mere cleverness, or cunning, and related to a transformative sensitivity to others (Dunne 1993: 260–1, 271). This understanding cannot be stated or theorised, 'it is realized always in concrete applications and never resolves itself into formulated knowledge that can be possessed apart from these applications' (Dunne 1993: 127).

The fact that the source text can never exist outside contemporary perceptions, denotes that one cannot have access to its meanings independent of one's present understandings. Aristotle's *phronesis* and Gadamer's hermeneutics are used here precisely because they form part of my Western academic context in their relevance to textual interpretation, especially when the text in question itself speaks of a *phronesis*-type *praxis*. It is therefore through a 'fusion of both these horizons', of text and interpreter, that Gurū Nānak's words can speak again and differently, if they are to speak appropriately at all.

Phronesis and tradition

Being a *praxis*, involved with the inevitable movement of experience, *phronetic hermeneutics* also entails a nondual deconstruction of any theoretical dualities: 'between being and knowing, matter and form, means and end, particular and universal, "possession" and "application" – which is inherent in the above characteristics makes of *phronesis* a very fluid reality' (Dunne 1993: 127). Perhaps the most important nonduality however, is that between being and acting where one is never outside one to comment upon the other; all understanding or being is a form of action and all action reflects a form of understanding/being. But what of the nonduality between *techne* and *phronesis*? Bernstein criticises Gadamer for treating them as binary opposites, reflecting an overall thesis that argues for truth (*phronesis*) over method (*techne*). Instead Bernstein argues that '*techne* without *phronesis* is blind, while *phronesis* without *techne* is empty' (1983: 161).

Bernstein's interjection however seems to confuse and simplify the issues, for Gadamer's truth is aligned to how well method is appropriated in *praxis* (*phronesis* as well as *techne*). It also seems clear, from a broad perspective that an activity can be overdetermined by abiding by the rules of a tradition (*theoria*), and that there are occasions where activity occurs spontaneously and creatively from the demands of

situation itself (*praxis*); likewise there seems to be an important difference between 'making' according to a plan, requiring skills (*techne*), and an 'acting' (*phronesis*) according to unpredictable and varying situational factors that relies on no such preparation, bar that of past experience. Bernstein confuses Aristotle's distinction between a mechanical making and an acting agent. The former requires no moral dimension as does the latter. Nevertheless to polarise truth and method as though one were an overriding absolute and the other mere worldly convention is to miss the point of the historicity of Being in becoming, and the ontological dependency of the 'truth' on various 'methods' for its communication. In other words to understand truth as an ideal apart from human action is to miss the point of human being.

Perhaps the most important criticism of Gadamer's *phronesis* however, is that it conserves tradition which is simply assumed to be 'there', or present in an accessible form of a shared *ethos*, and that it is inherently 'good'. It is, however, unclear what constitutes a tradition and whether or not the transition to modernity and its intensification (often termed post-modernity) does not actually fracture and conflate past traditions into unrecognisable fragments wherein patterns lie kaleidoscopically, and almost wholly dependent upon the individual perspective taken. What then happens to a 'history of effects' at such a juncture? How is the past, no longer monolithically conceived, influencing the diversified present? Although one cannot begin thinking by 'bracketing' one's inherited world-view, there is a problem in understanding just what that pre-given 'tradition' is. Smith agrees with Vattimo (1997) and Heidegger that,

... we are presently in a situation where traditions and *ethoi* have substantially collapsed because we do not – in Arendt's terms – have a shared public space. Vattimo is correct in saying that everything in our times points toward fragmentation, and that modern mass communication technologies exacerbate that tendency. We are confronted with an arena of multiple, parallel, conflicting perspectives, not a shared *ethos*. (Smith 1996: 290. fn.12).

Gadamer does not acknowledge that such an *ethos* in which *phronesis* will flourish must first be created. Can it simply be assumed that the heritage of tradition always remains intact in such a way that the possibility of *phronesis* is always secured? And if not, then how to foster such an *ethos* relevant to post or late modern times remains unthought by Gadamer. In this respect Bernstein remarks that,

Ironically, there is something almost *unhistorical* in the way in which Gadamer appropriates *phronesis*. Except for some occasional remarks, we do not find any detailed systematic analysis of social structure and causes of the deformation of *praxis* in contemporary society. Insufficient attention is paid to the historical differences that would illuminate precisely how *praxis* and *phronesis* are threatened and undermined in the contemporary world... Gadamer... stops short of facing the

issues of what is to be done when the *polis* or community itself is 'corrupt'. (1983: 158).

Habermas (1984) also notes how various forms of power relations prevalent at different levels and in different institutions of society operate to deform and curtail *praxis* of the *phronesis* type. Hermeneutical dialogue cannot be assumed to be divorced from the ideological biases and distortions a tradition or *ethos* may have. Gadamer's hermeneutics need then to be complemented by a hermeneutics of suspicion (originally Nietzsche, Marx and Freud), before it can communicate effectively in a shared *ethos*. But even if such vigilant suspicion were incorporated in one's hermeneutics, it would not encourage *phronesis* unless a serious challenge to modernity's theory-led culture took place. Smith, takes issue with Habermas on this very point, for prioritising *theoria* over *praxis*, and argues that the only way out of modernity's vice-grip of theory, is to create the conditions that will allow *praxis* to dominate theory.¹² This is because (Western) modernity has been acting out of a destructive impulse to control nature and its unpredictability, to dominate *praxis* by a theoretical reason evidenced in the power of technological science:

Modern theoretical Reason refuses to allow *praxis* to have any autonomy. A world in which *praxis* is severed from modern theory opens the possibility of re-establishing the sovereign dignity of something like practical wisdom or prudence (*phronesis*) in the face of the modern hegemony of projecting, theoretical Reason qua Will. (Smith 1996: 289–90).

Smith goes beyond Gadamer by detecting those very conditions which have led to an over theorised modern age, by locating them in what he calls a 'spirit of revenge' that has its roots in a fear and desire to control chance, most evident in man's pathological need to dominate the chaos of nature. He notes, 'the possibility of freeing *praxis* from the Spirit of Revenge requires grounding it in primary, lived experiences. We can call these the experiences of the *Lebenswelt*' (Smith 1996: 297). But it is hard to escape the hermeneutical circle here, since these 'primary lived experiences' of the lifeworld are imbued with past presuppositions, no matter how attentive one is to present *praxis*. A similar problem arises with Caputo's critique of Gadamer for failing to put the truth of tradition into question.¹³ But, yet again, putting tradition into question itself assumes that one can step back from it – a move that the hermeneutical situation complicates. To what extent is any movement 'beyond' a tradition actually predicated by the

¹² 'Habermas's theory of communication is still an example of a theorist imposing theoretical frames on life rather than allowing actual communication to present itself... Habermas's theory itself seems to me to intrude upon the integrity of the lifeworld and its communication. I must agree with Lyotard that Habermas is trying to impose just one more metanarrative'. (Smith 1996: 300).

¹³ '[Gadamer] never asks to what extent the play of tradition is a power play and its unity something that has been enforced by the powers that be' (Caputo 1987: 112).

possibilities of that tradition? Caputo makes tentative steps towards answering this question by arguing that

... the hermeneutic conception of *phronesis* presupposes an existing schema, a world already in place. It is the virtue of applying or appropriating a pre-existing paradigm. But what happens at that point where the schema is in crisis, where worlds founder...? Then *phronesis* itself is put in crisis. For then it is not a question of having the skill to apply but of knowing what to apply... *Phronesis* cannot function if there is a conflict about who the prudent man is. (1987: 210–11, 217).

In the Sikh diaspora such a crisis is obvious; migration into alien cultural contexts and the loss of Panjabi as a 'mother-tongue' have yielded a period of instability and chaos, and a rootless hybrid culture that is struggling with the grammar and codes of a new cultural ethos. Here Caputo's 'radical hermeneutics' offers a resolution not to conserve via a Gadamerian *phronesis* but to create anew, upon those very ruptures through 'civility' and thereby acknowledge the diversity of world-views:

If the Aristotelian *polis* demanded *phronesis*, that is, the skill to apply the agreed-upon paradigm, the modern mega-*polis* requires civility, which is a kind of meta-*phronesis*, which means the skill to cope with competing paradigms. Civility is the virtue of knowing how to like and live with the dissemination of *ethos*. (Caputo 1987: 262).

Whilst there is an important point being made here about the difference in hermeneutical thinking when it is forced to think inter-traditionally, rather than comfortably pondering intra-traditionally, Caputo is perhaps disingenuous to allocate the force of 'critical thinking' only to the former and not to the latter. Criticism does not only come from 'outside' or beyond the tradition. Furthermore he seems to reduce *phronesis* to application, having himself acknowledged that Gadamer's 'application' is better understood as 'creative appropriation', and also overlooks the fundamental definition of *phronesis* that is not worked out in remembrance of tradition, but is directed by the situation itself in novel ways.

There seems to be great value in a hermeneutic *phronesis* given that it provides a knowledge that always keeps the tradition grounded in *praxis*, and is therefore itself put into question as a result of that *praxis*. However, the most important critique of Caputo's radical hermeneutics as civil *phronesis* is that in all his descriptive unpackings thereof, none differ in any marked way from what has been discussed as *praxis* and *phronesis* previously by Gadamer:

It offers no overall strategies, no total schemes or master plans, but only local strategies for local action... It does not speak in the name of a master plan; it speaks only of a series of contingent, ad hoc, local plans devised here and now to offset the exclusionary character of the prevailing system. (Caputo 1987: 263–4).

Indeed this is hardly surprising, for if any formulation of civil *phronesis* wandered away from a *praxis* centre and became theorised, a replication of modernist assumptions would inevitably ensue. It is for this reason that, like Gadamer, the approach here is not to seek a hermeneutic method apart from the context of the *praxis* appropriate to the text's tradition and its own 'hermeneutic' claims. In this respect, a contextual hermeneutics is sought as a way of informing engagement with the text, to avoid manipulating it according to pre-supposed theories be they of Semitic monotheism, or Hindu monism, or indeed Western hermeneutics in the form of theory.

Hermeneutics and the trope of *praxis* in respect of the dynamics of the text, interpreter and application, have been completely overlooked in Sikh Studies where meanings are assumed fixed and universal regardless of language, place and culture. Furthermore, with hindsight it is not difficult to see the various engagements with the GGS as being largely dictated by the interpretive frameworks of past times.